

MINUTES
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission Meeting
Helena Headquarters
1420 East 6th Avenue - Helena, MT 59620
CONFERENCE CALL

August 5, 2005

Commission Members Present: Steve Doherty, Chairman; Shane Colton; John Brenden; Vic Workman.

Fish, Wildlife & Parks Staff: Larry Peterman; Chris Smith; Bob Lane; Regena Peterson; Amy Hansen of the Associated Press

Chairman Doherty called the conference call meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

1. Emergency Restrictions to Close the Clark Fork River to Recreation. Larry Peterman, FWP Chief of Field Operations / Acting Director, stated that as of yesterday, a series of twelve fires had started along Highway I-90 west of Missoula. Efforts are being made to contain them, however one fire burned through the Town of Alberton. The interstate has been closed to traffic since yesterday.

The US Forest Service, who will take over management of the fire complex, has requested that FWP close the twenty-mile stretch of the Clark Fork River from the Petty Creek Fishing Access Site, west of Missoula, to the Tarkio Fishing Access Site, so fire-fighting helicopters can bucket water from the river without risk to the public's safety. Closure would encompass all activities, recreational and occupational.

Peterman stated that similar emergency actions were taken in 2003 on Placid Lake and Nevada Creek Reservoir to allow bombers to fly low and scoop water for fire-fighting efforts.

Peterman read excerpts from the rule (a copy of the rule is included in the commission file for this conference call).

RULE 1 CLARK FORK RIVER TEMPORARY EMERGENCY CLOSURE

(1) The Clark Fork River west of Missoula is located in Missoula and Mineral Counties.

(2) The Clark Fork River from the Petty Creek Fishing Access Site to the Tarkio Fishing Access Site is closed to all boating, floating, and swimming, and any other public occupation of the river.

(3) This rule is effective as long as the Clark Fork River is needed as a source of water for fighting wildfires. The Commission delegates its authority to the department, in consultation with the Commissioner in the region, to determine when the Clark Fork River is again safe for boating, floating, swimming and any other occupation of the river.

Peterman said signs are being placed at the fishing access sites, and the Department will issue press releases. He said that FWP can close the fishing access sites, but actual water closures require Commission action. The river remains closed as long as it is actively used as a water source to fight fires - the rule is effective until such time.

Brenden inquired about the process of reopening the river. Peterman said that following notification by the Forest Service, FWP contacts the Commissioner from the particular area, in this case Workman, and then the river is reopened for use. If the Commissioner from the specific area is not available, the Chairman is contacted.

Action: Brenden moved and Colton seconded the motion to close the Clark Fork River to recreational and occupational use from the Petty Creek Fishing Access Site, west of Missoula, to the Tarkio Fishing Access Site until such time as the river is not necessary to fight wildfires. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 1:10 p.m.

Steve Doherty, Chairman

Larry Peterman, Acting Director